

**FACTORS THAT INHIBIT THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH
BY HISPANIC ADULTS**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There is a large group of Hispanic adults living in the United States (U.S.) who do not speak or speak little English. Because they lack of English proficiency, it is difficult for them to improve their quality of life, have access to better job opportunities or improve their level of education.

As adult immigrants, Hispanics generally come from an economically disadvantaged group. Because of this, it is very difficult for them to find the time and financial resources to invest in learning a second language (L2) (Wang, 2006; Hayes, 1989; Tse, 2001). In addition to economic problems, many Hispanics have also a low level of formal education. As a result, they are not likely to develop English language skills because they try to learn English in English as a Second Language programs (ESL) which are based on formal education and on knowledge of their native language (L1) (Greenberg et al, 1992, Bonch-Bruevich, 2001; Mills, 2005; Garcia 2003).

With respect to ESL programs, many Hispanics also face challenges finding and remaining in an ESL program. In some places, ESL classes are not available for all the Hispanic population that needs them.

On the other hand, however, for many Hispanics it is difficult to find an ESL program that matches and fulfills their needs, expectations and circumstances (Wheling, 1999; Lee, 2007).

According to Hayes (1989), Hispanics' educational progress and economic advancement is often hindered by their limited English language skills. This claim not only applies to recent immigrants but also long-term residents. Tse (2001) indicates that the longer the immigrants have resided in the U.S., the better the English skills they have developed. However, there are immigrants who have been the U.S. for years and speak very little English. Understanding the barriers to English acquisition may help education specialists better serve the needs of these potential learners, and in particular, help to increase the level of literacy among Hispanic Americans in the U.S.

Limited English proficiency has been a major barrier to many immigrants. As a result, they cannot pursue further education, enter and advance in the job market or improve their personal and family lives. According to Wang (2006), research shows that limited English proficiency is directly associated with unemployment and noncontinuous employment, lower salaries, health problems, and safety problems in the workplace. She argues that greater English proficiency not only improves immigrants' salaries, but also improves productivity in general. Thus, better communication skills benefit everybody. With the economic structure of the world, each person's effort is necessary to maintain

the prosperous economic base of the U.S. If companies have workers who are easily able to communicate, this benefits employees, employers, customers, and the country itself.

Finally, second language (SL) research has shown that a good number of immigrants do not have many opportunities to interact with native speakers (NSs) and in some cases they hardly ever use English in their daily lives (Block, 2007; Callahan, 2001; Schecter & Bailey, 1997).

Objectives and Hypotheses

I suggest that the factors keeping Hispanics from learning English are socio-economic, educational and cultural, such as: limited time and limited money, low level of education, difficult access to adequate ESL programs, and little contact with NSs. My primary goal was identify the reasons why 12 Hispanic adults who have been in the U.S. for a long time are not learning to speak English well.

Methodology

The present research is an in depth case study of the English language learning experiences of 12 Spanish-speaking adults from Mexico. It was carried out in the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana, where there are many Hispanic adults, mainly from Mexico, who face this problem. The methodology consisted of the application of three techniques to gather data: interviews, participant observation, and free lists generated by the subjects.

The participants for this research were 12 Hispanic adults from Mexico, including males and females. They share the following characteristics: a) they came to the U.S. as teenagers (but did not attend school in the U.S.) or as young adults; b) they have been in

the U.S. for at least five years; c) they do not speak English or speak very little; and d) they live in primarily Anglo-neighborhoods.

The participants were interviewed in their L1 (Spanish) in order to collect information about the participants' personal and background and to determine the factors which have held them back from learning English. During the interview, the participants shared their experiences with trying to acquire English, and described how they have been able to survive in an English speaking country, in spite of the language barrier. They were also encouraged to share stories about cases in which communication with English speakers has been difficult, and to describe the strategies the participants employed in order to communicate with English speakers.

In addition to the interview, I also observed the participants as they went about their daily lives on two occasions (one weekday and one weekend) over one month, for at least 10 hours each time. I was not able to observe some of the participants at work due to employment restrictions. However, we communicated by telephone throughout their work hours. These participants reported to me about their interactions. The purpose of these observations was to document their interactions with English speakers and to describe how they managed to interact despite their little English skills.

Finally, the last method that was used was the use of free list. The participants were asked to compile a free list of the factors that have prevented them from learning English and of the factors they think would help them learn English. The objective of this free list was to obtain the immigrants' perception on this issue, and later explore and analyze those factors.

Significance of the Research

There are currently a good number of immigrants living in the U.S. who are not able to communicate effectively in English. This is a problem, since English is without question the dominant language in the U.S. English is used in institutional contexts for work, school, government, education, industry and popular culture. In order to help immigrants adjust and integrate in the U.S., they need to be able to communicate with others effectively in English (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Dudley, 2007). Little research has been done on how to facilitate the immigrants' integration. Helping these immigrants not only benefits them, but it also benefits the production of the country as well.

Popular claims argue that Hispanics do not want to learn English (Shuy, 1981; Tse, 2001), or even worse, claim that Hispanics, especially Mexicans, do not want to incorporate into main stream U.S. culture (Huntington, 2004). In contrast, research has shown that in fact Hispanics want to learn and improve their English skills. For example, in 1999, more than the half (55%) of the immigrants enrolled in ESL classes in the U.S. in 1999, were Hispanics (Wang, 2006).

This project is designed to help educators acknowledge the challenges faced by the Hispanic immigrant population in learning English. Greater efforts are needed to reach out to these immigrants. Every person, immigrant or not, represents a vital part of the economic development of the U.S. (Wang, 2006). Finally, this research also intends to update existing literature on social components of adults and L2 learning.

Chapter 2

Background

Why People Migrate

The whole world is experiencing extreme economic changes as a consequence of globalization (Block, 2007). This process is often accompanied by enormous dislocations and migrations of people and can lead to the rise of new powerful regions. For this reason, Block (2007, p. 31) explains that in the current global age people are constantly moving around the world. He describes migration as the “movement of people across borders, both by choice and under economic and political forces, which involves stays of over a year.”

In many cases, people from lower economic and social backgrounds feel motivated to migrate in order to improve their families’ quality of life because they have not been able to succeed in their native countries. As a result, industrialized countries are a magnet to people from developing countries (Tum, 2003). One of the places people migrate to is the U.S. because of its economic stability and wide range of opportunities. Immigrants, including Hispanics from all over Latin America, usually think that migrating to the U.S. means they will live a better life. They assume that once in the U.S., they will be able to

achieve the American Dream: access to better education, home ownership, access to better health service, and economic security (Yzaguirre, 2004).

Characteristics of Hispanic Immigrants in the U. S.

During the last decades, the U.S. has experienced an increasing immigrant influx of immigrants from countries of Latin America (Tum, 2003) and particularly from Mexico. The 2007 census showed that Hispanics make up 13% of the U.S. population. Currently, there are more than 44 million Hispanics living in the U.S., according to the U.S. 2007 Census Bureau. The 2000 census showed that Hispanics contributed to half of national increase in the U.S. population in that year. Later, Martinez-Espinoza, Fonseca, & Chance (2003) mentioned that in 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau found that Hispanics constituted the largest minority group in the U.S. They outnumbered African Americans, who used to be the largest minority group in the U.S.

Some of the immigrants do not intend to settle in another country. They migrate to other countries for a short period of time. They are called 'sojourners' (short-termers). They migrate with the purpose of working temporarily and then return to their native countries. These people have frequently reported that they are not interested in learning the country's language or culture beyond the instrumental stage (Shuy, 1981). However, the majority of immigrants are looking to live in a better place and under better conditions for them and for their families.

Often immigrants are of low socio economic status (Wang, 2006; Hayes, 1989). Immigrant Hispanics have limited job opportunities because of their monolingualism and

poor English skills. Employers maintain that typically monolingual Spanish workers remain at the low end of the career ladder. A large number of these immigrants (especially the ones who are illegal in the country) regularly work in low-skill jobs, particularly in the hospitality industry, construction and agriculture. These jobs are considered cheap labor (A Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2009; Shuy, 1981). As a result, the jobs are not well paid and the immigrants must work long hours or have more than one job in order to survive. In many cases, immigrants not only have to support their families and their household, but they support relatives in their native countries as well.

Regarding immigrants' educational background, some immigrants have not received formal education in their native countries. Research indicates that immigrants with formal education are more likely to become bilingual (Greenberg, Macias, Rhodes, & Chan, 2001; Bonch-Bruevich, 2001; Mills, 2005; Garcia 2003). Nevertheless, there are a number of immigrants who were unable to complete their K-12 education in their native country. These immigrants are least likely to develop English language skills, and have greater difficulty in ESL classes (Greenberg, Macias, Rhodes, & Chan, 2001; Wang, 2006).

The city of Fort Wayne

Hispanics, especially Mexicans, usually migrate to the so called big states such as New York, California, etc. (The Evergreen State College, 2009; Marcos-Marín, 2008; Murray & Simon, 2006). However, lately, they have been migrating to all the states and to most of the cities in the U.S. According to Yzaguirre (2004), Mexican immigrants are currently dispersing beyond the traditional gateway states. In fact, the number of Mexicans settling in nontraditional U.S. destinations such as the South and Midwest has been rising dramatically since 1980. The Pew Hispanic Center and the Brookings Institution claims that, “Latinos are dispersing geographically at a faster rate than the great waves of European immigrants a century ago” (Yzaguirre, 2004, p. 4). A good example of this wave of immigrants is found in Indiana, specifically in the city of Fort Wayne; which is the home to the participants of this research.

Fort Wayne is a city in Allen County in northeastern Indiana. Fort Wayne has a population of about 500,000 inhabitants. There are three main ethnic groups that make up this county: Anglo-American, African-American, and Hispanic. On the 2000 census form, 98.2% of the population reported being Anglo-American, with 11.3% of the population reporting African American and 4.2% reporting Hispanic (Demographics, 2007).

Fort Wayne is considered to be an attractive place to live, work, and play. Its downtown area is known for quality art venues, along with many cultural attractions and activities (CityTownInfo.Com, 2008). There are no traffic backups; there are good environmental conditions and no rising costs that constrain the development of this city,

according to the City of Fort Wayne, official website (2008). As a result, many low-income individuals from other cities are attracted to this city for its “easy” and comfortable lifestyle.

ESL Programs in the U. S.

ESL programs and other adult education programs are designed to promote self-sufficiency in English, and provide adults with the necessary tools to become financially independent and contributing members of the society (Wang, 2006). Wang (2006) asserts that education and English instruction need to be accessible for every individual. It is important not only for the immigrants but also for the well-being of the whole nation.

General ESL classes focus on the development of English skills in the context of life skills. Students learn to use English for functions of daily life, such as going to the doctor, getting a job, going shopping, and so forth (National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008). Unfortunately, there are a number of Hispanic immigrants who do not have access to ESL classes because they do not have legal residency or a social security number. There are accounts of Hispanic adults who have mentioned that they have not been able to register for an English class due to their illegal status (Tum, 2003).

There have been reports that language instructors give inadequate language input to their students. Because they often have low expectations of their students, they fail to give them the kind of language input they need to be effective in the language. For successful language learning and teaching, the teachers need to be aware of the processes of language acquisition and the modification of identity (Norton, 1997).

Gender in the ESL classroom is another factor that needs to be taken into account. ESL teachers generally agree that in adult English programs in the U.S., males tend to outnumber females (Kouritzin, 2000; Wang, 2006). Hispanic men generally provide financially for the family and usually have to interact publicly at work. In contrast, women provide sustenance and nurturing for the family, usually at home. As mothers and housewives, women are guardians of familial heritage. They are keepers of the family's first language and culture (Kouritzin, 2000).

Research shows that women are often prevented from attending ESL classes by lack of childcare or transportation (Hayes, 1989; Wang, 2006; Shuy, 1981; Kouritzin, 2000). Generally, female Hispanics tend to remain at home to deal with concerns of home, extended family and immediate community. As a result, English instruction does not reach a large number of them (Shuy, 1981). They have been left behind by the adult education system, which further complicates their English acquisition.

ESL programs vary considerably nationwide. To illustrate, Rance-Roney (1995) mentions that adults study English in the U.S. in a wide variety of settings. For example: church basements, public schools, workplaces, community centers and so forth. Some of them are more successful than others. For example, in some areas of the country, ESL resources are very limited because immigrant populations are relatively new. These ESL programs have not been developed yet and there are few trained adult ESL teachers available. Moreover, professional development opportunities for teachers are also limited (National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008).

Many of the Hispanics who do not speak English have participated in ESL classes but they have abandoned them for many different reasons, in most of the cases, related to economic factors. For instance, Wang, (2006) cites that there are many Hispanic ESL learners who report working full-time and part-time jobs for long hours at minimum wages. Many of them also have seasonal jobs that oblige them to migrate around the states. In these cases, the adults' working schedule is linked with their economic stability and creates a barrier for their retention in ESL education. Other Hispanics do not feel they are making progress in their English acquisition (Wang, 2006). They claim the curriculum does not match their learning needs and/or expectations (National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008). As a result, they may lose motivation and abandon the ESL classes. Consequently, they do not acquire the English language skills they still need.

In addition to socio-cultural factors, there are other issues involved in learning a new language that need to be considered, since they play an important role in the L2 acquisition process. These range from linguistic to psychological factors.

Issues in Second Language Acquisition

Research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) demonstrates that there are many factors involved that can either enhance or hinder the process of acquisition of a second language. These factors include: linguistic factors, age, and psychological factors (Brown, 2007b). The linguistic factors center on language itself and how learners deal with complex linguistic systems. Brown (2007b) identifies three principles within the

linguistic factors, these are: The L1 Effect, Interlanguage, and Communicative Competence.

The learners' L1 exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the L2 system. This influence exercises both facilitating and interfering effects on the comprehension and production and of the L2 (Brown, 2007b). Although the facilitating effects of the L1 are powerful in the process of acquiring an L2, the errors produced in the L2 are more salient.

The second linguistic factor has to do with the development of the second language by L2 learners known as interlanguage. While learning, L2 learners go through a systematic or quasi-systematic process as they progress to full competence in the L2. Before gaining full competence, L2 learners make errors caused, in part, by using patterns from the mother tongue, extending patterns from the L2 (overgeneralizing), and so forth. Utilizing feedback from others contributes to successful interlanguage development (Brown, 2007b; Mitchell & Miles, 2004). Research indicates that good classroom instruction can make a difference in the speed and success of language acquisition while students pass through the interlanguage stages of development (Doughty, 2003; Ellis, 2005 as cited in Brown, 2007b).

Communicative competence, which should be the goal of language classroom instruction, is best achieved by giving due attention to language use in context. Other factors that should also be taken into account are: fluency and accuracy; and inclusion of authentic language and natural contexts. Lastly, it is also important to help learners apply classroom learning in the real world. Since most of the adult learners study English in a

formal environment, what they learn in the language classroom is not necessarily natural language. Some of the language they learn is artificial and not used outside the classroom.

Besides the linguistic factors discussed above, age is involved in L2 acquisition. Most discussions about age and SLA center on the issue of whether there is a *critical period* (CP) for the acquisition of an L2 (Brown, 2007a). A CP for language learning is often defined, “as a sharp decline in learning outcomes with age” (Chiswick & Miller, 2008, p. 16). As a similar view, Brown (2007a, p. 380) defines it as, “a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily”.

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) claims that there is a biological timetable for both first and second language acquisition resulting in native competence. This critical point is said to occur around the age of puberty (Brown, 2007a; Komarova & Nowak, 2001). After this critical age, it is increasingly difficult to acquire a language and almost impossible to acquire normal or native-like competence (Perez Canado, 2007; Birdsong, 1999; Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2008; Mayberry, 2007). Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley (2003) declare that research on the CPH has shown that there is evidence that older L2 learners have greater difficulty in learning an L2. This claim is supported by L2 learners’ personal anecdotes, however, it has been reported that there are also older L2 learners who have achieved native-like competence in their L2 (Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley 2003).

Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley (2003) also observe that learning becomes compromised with age because of factors that are not specifically related to language.

These factors may include social, educational, and cognitive constraints (working-memory limitations, cognitive slowing, or attentional deficits). These issues undoubtedly interfere with an L2 learners' ability to successfully learn a new language. "The degree of success in L2 acquisition declines throughout the life span (Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley 2003; p. 14)".

There are other approaches on this topic too that claim that age itself is not the main determiner of successful language acquisition. For example Stevens (1999), mentions that immigrants who enter the country younger are more likely to go to school in the U.S., probably marry a native-born American and thus be more successful in acquiring the L2. Language acquisition is considered a social process at any age. Learners need to be extensively exposed to the language. They also need opportunities to practice receptive and active skills, which require communicative and social interaction. Among the Hispanic adults who do not speak English, there are a good number of them who came to the U.S. when they were either teenagers or young adults. They did not have the opportunity to attend school in the U.S., and they have not been exposed to enough English to pick up the language. These factors have obstructed the SLA process for many immigrants.

Psychological Factors in SLA

When discussing SLA, psychological and affective factors cannot be excluded. Factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and identity need to be discussed. Brown (2007a, p. 154) states, "it could easily be claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of

your-self, and self-efficacy.” It can also be described as “the breeze that gently propels the ship to his final destination” (Tum, 2003; p 65). In contrast, when immigrants lack self-esteem when learning a language, it holds back the acquisition of the target language. Frustration and humiliation make the student unable to develop the language skills they need to acquire the L2. From this point of view, lack of self-esteem needs to be considered to determine whether it is a source of frustration for Hispanics who have not been successful in acquiring English (Arnold, 1999).

“Motivation is a key to learning in general” (Brown, 2007a, p. 168). Many would agree with Brown that motivation is very helpful when learning a new language due to the investment of time, effort, money, and commitment that is needed. Motivation can also be described as internal or external anticipation of reward, choices made about objectives to pursue, and the effort put forth in their completion (Brown, 2007a). There have been reports that show that Hispanics come into ESL classrooms motivated to learn English. Unfortunately, this motivation is not maintained. Research is needed to find out how motivation is not only inspired, but fostered throughout the process of SLA.

Immigrants, especially new immigrants, also undergo the process of adjusting and adapting to a new culture. This process is called acculturation (Brown, 2007a; Vieira & Trinade, 2008; Scheu & Bou, 1990; Mills, 2005). Within this process, non-native speakers (NNs) not only struggle with the acquisition of the new language and culture, but also struggle with the construction and redefinition of their own identity (Block, 2007; Davis, 1999, Lin 2008, Nero 2005; Tum, 2003; Friedman, 2003). For many immigrants the acculturation process includes feelings of social uncertainty or

dissatisfaction, often referred to as “anomie” or “anomia” (Ritter, 1987) mixed with social instability. They lose some of the ties to their native culture and adapt to the second culture. This experience is not very pleasant because they experience fear, regret, anxiety, insecurity, and frustration, until they achieve the final stage of acculturation: assimilation or adaptation and acceptance of the new culture (Brown, 2007a). This overwhelming experience creates more barriers to immigrants’ L2 acquisition process.

Lastly, identity also plays a role in the lives of the immigrants. When people travel and settle in different places, the formation and reconfiguration of new identities occurs (Friedman, 2003). Immigrants are forced to reconstruct and redefine themselves for their own sense of security (Davis, 1999; Block, 2007; Lin, 2008). Identity is instrumental because it can either help immigrants to pursue their goals or can create a barrier that impedes the acquisition of both the new language and the new culture (Davis, 1999).

Identity shapes Hispanic immigrants’ attitudes about their own L1, Spanish, and also about their L2, English. This includes the various uses of and beliefs about each language and about the people who use each language (Shuy, 1981). Adjusting to a new culture and learning a new language is not an easy task, especially if NSs do not have a positive attitude toward foreigners. If NSs are racists, this may place a further barrier between the two groups.

It is reported that the attitudes of the NSs of the majority language toward the minority speakers and their languages are often not very promising (Shuy, 1981). For instance, some NSs remind immigrants that they are foreigners and thus, they should not

be in their country (Block, 2007). Many Americans claim that Hispanics have little interest in or ability to learn English. Thus, they are not able to integrate into the larger Anglo culture (Shuy, 1981). Additionally, there have been Americans who do not have a positive attitude toward languages other than English. They believe, and let Hispanics know, that they should discontinue speaking Spanish and speak English, in order to integrate into the American society (Shuy, 1981). This situation gives Hispanics a negative impression of American culture and its language, English. In the U.S., there are still psychological and even physical separations between Hispanics and Americans (Tum, 2003). Many Hispanics are segregated from Anglo-Americans. Thus, Hispanics tend to create an ethnic and language community where they can interact among themselves using the same language (Wilkes & Iceland, 2008). All of these factors make L2 acquisition even more difficult for Hispanic adults.

Tum (2003) argues that racism impedes SLA. The participants in his research, which focuses on the motivations of Central American males learning English, mentioned that they have experienced discrimination. This prejudice appears to be based on Hispanics' skin color, accent, and poor English skills. The social phenomenon of racism as it is found in the U.S. and practiced against the Hispanics is reflected in the narratives of Tum's participants. It is easy to conclude then, that to learn English in an 'overtly racist society' (Tum, 2003) makes the language acquisition process even more difficult; especially when the immigrants feel alienation and fear (Shuy, 1981).

Some immigrants do not have much access to local people (Block, 2007; Kouritzin, 2000). Block (2007, p. 77) argues that the Naturalistic Approach's assumption,

“the best way to learn a language is to be there” where the target language is the predominant language of day-to-day activity does not apply to every immigrant. Thus, these immigrants neither become part of their culture nor learn their language. Many immigrants including Hispanics report that they have not had opportunities to interact on an extended basis with NSs of English. Moreover, they mention that they hardly ever use the target language among co-workers, friends, and/or relatives. In some cases, they rarely use English in their daily lives (Block, 2007; Callahan, 2001; Schecter, 1997). This helps to explain why some immigrant adults are not able to learn or develop fluently in the language of the country they have settled in.

The SLA literature supports the notion that SL learners benefit the most from NSS and NNs interactions, since they receive natural input. This input gives L2 learners considerable exposure to the L2 language, and opportunities to practice language skills through meaningful communicative and social interaction (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lee, 2007).

Lindeman (2002) mentions that NSs’ negative attitudes toward NNSs, is at the root of the problem of social inequality provoked in part by social distance. In social distance, the NSs locate NNs as a subordinate group.

Sociologist Emily Bogardus defines social distance as the level of understanding that functions not only between one person and another person, but also between person and group, and between one group and another group (Ritter, 1987). Social distance is very closely related with attitude. If speakers believe there to be social distance, it will also be reflected in their conversations with people who look and sound different from

them. Regarding language, they perceive speaking differences negatively with regard to task, intellectual, or social capabilities (Burroughs, 2008). As a result, NSs may become unenthusiastic or hostile interlocutors with NNSs. They reject their communicative burden, claim NNSs' communication is unintelligible, and are not willing to engage in communicative interaction (Isaacs, 2008; Brown, 2007a). An additional factor is that NNSs, especially in an L2 setting, may not learn the Standard form of the language. Usually, vernacular varieties are stigmatized by the NSs, especially if this vernacular variation is used by NNSs (Zhiming, 2003), impacting negatively on the NNS's persona and their oral communication competence as well (Burroughs, 2008).

Learning to speak an L2 can take a person a long period of time. Depending on the learner's abilities and socio-cultural background, this process can take anywhere from two to ten years (Kouritzin, 2000). In addition to these factors, there are also linguistic, psychological and even physical factors (such as age) which affect how successful a person will be in learning an L2. Moreover, there are other factors that the L2 learner cannot control at all, such as the negative attitudes that NSs have against NNSs, access to appropriate ESL classes and the learning language context(s). These factors also have a strong influence on the success/failure of the L2 learner.

The areas discussed in this review show what has been done before and sets up a platform for the current research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This research project consists of a case study of the English language learning experiences of 12 Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico who have little competence in English despite having lived in the U.S. for a number of years.

This research hypothesizes that Hispanic immigrants have not been able to learn English for social reasons related in part to their low-socio economic status. These factors include limited time, limited money, low level of education, complicated access to adequate ESL programs, and little contact with NSs of English. In order to provide insights into the behavior of a wider research population, a relatively homogenous sample was desirable. The participants selected for the study were limited to individuals who met the following criteria: 1) native Spanish speakers; 2) Hispanics from Mexico; 3) low level of English skills; 4) teenagers and young adults upon arrival to the U.S.; 5) incomplete schooling (K-12) 6) residence in the U.S. of at least five years 7) residence in Anglo communities in Fort Wayne.

Hispanic immigrants were chosen because there is a fast-growing Hispanic population in Indiana, which is experiencing difficulties in learning English. Participants from Mexico were chosen for two reasons. First, in order to keep the sample relatively homogenous, and second, because there are more Hispanics from Mexico than from any other Latin American country. Since it is assumed that older immigrants tend to keep their L1 and often do not become competent in an L2, younger immigrants who would ideally be more successful language learners were chosen for this project. Thus, it was important to find participants who had arrived in the U.S. as teenagers and young adults (under 30 years of age). It is also assumed that Hispanics in the U.S. who live in Hispanic neighborhoods tend to keep their L1 and may not have the opportunity to interact in English. Consequently, participants who resided in Anglo communities and were exposed to an English-speaking community were chosen to participate in this project.

The participants were selected using the Snowball Method (Bernard, 2006). The participants' and my own social networks were used to recruit new potential participants. The participants were twelve subjects, 5 male and 7 female Hispanic adults aged 22-36. They are all originally from Mexico and all live in Anglo neighborhoods in the city of Fort Wayne in Indiana. Their L1 is Spanish and they do not speak any other language. Some of the participants reported being descendents of specific ethnic groups, e.g. Mayan, Nahuatl, or Mestizo (a person of mixed European and Native American ancestry). However, seven of the participants said that they did not know the specific ethnic group they belonged to or did not have much information about their family heritage. All but one of the participants were parents with between 1-3 children each (ranging in age from one month to 12 years).

The participants reported having unskilled occupations in Mexico before coming to the U.S. They worked in factories, cleaning, construction, and farming, and two of the females were housewives. Currently, three of the males work in construction. Another works in a fast food restaurant, and the last works as a butcher in a Mexican restaurant with other Hispanic employees. Two females are housewives and stay home to take care for their children. Three other females work in cleaning (hotels and apartments). Of the last two female participants, one works in a fast food restaurant and the other works in a factory. On the subject of educational background, they did not finish their K-12 schooling either in Mexico or the U.S. The last grade they attended in Mexico ranges between 3 – 9 grades.

All the participants have resided in the U.S. between 5-15 years. They all migrated to the U.S. when they were teenagers or young adults. The age of arrival ranged from 14 to 27. The majority (eight) migrated when they were teenagers (14-18), and four when they were young adults (20-27).

All of the participants reported that they did not speak English well. They all described their English proficiency level as very basic. They all know some vocabulary, phrases, and numbers in English. They could also identify themselves in English, give greetings, ask and answer simple questions, and the like. They also know some technical vocabulary they have learned at their places of work. However, they all stated that they could not carry out a conversation in English, and did not feel comfortable speaking in English.

When asked why they decided to come to the U.S., 10 of the participants mentioned that they wanted to improve their economic situation. They mentioned that they not only wanted to improve on a personal level, but also that they wanted to help their close relatives back in Mexico. In some cases, they did not have a job in Mexico, and in others their wages were not high enough to progress economically. Two females reported that they came to the U.S. because they wanted to be with their husbands, who had immigrated previously. The reasons that their husbands migrated were also related to improving their economic situation.

Finally, all participants reported belonging to a low socio-economic status. They brought up that they only have enough income to cover basic daily needs. In most households, there is more than one family member who works and supports the family and helps to cover those needs. Some feel their economic situation has improved in some ways compared to the economic situation they had back home. On the other hand, some of them say that they are currently facing the same economic challenges they faced when they were in Mexico. As a result, some are preparing to leave the U.S. soon and return home.

The participants were all very cooperative and seemed to enjoy being interviewed. They felt that they had a valuable story to share. They wanted to talk about their English proficiency situation and point out that they have tried to learn English, but that has not been an easy mission.

Three methods were employed to collect information from the participants: participant observations (Dorian, 1999), interviews (Bernard, 2006), and free list (Bernard, 2006; Davis, 1995).

Participant Observation

The purpose of the observations was to describe the interactions of the participants -- who they interacted with, the context of the interactions, what language they used, and whether the interaction was successful. The participants were observed twice between the months of April and June, once on a weekday and once on a weekend. Observations began early in the morning and continued throughout the day. I accompanied the participants as they went about their normal daily routine. During the observations, I took notes about each of the interactions that took place. For instance, data about the individuals in the interaction (gender, age, L1) and their relationship with the participants (boss, co-worker, spouse, etc.), the setting (place, time, etc.), and the language they interacted in.

Interviews

The interview was semi-structured and consisted primarily of open-ended questions which usually took approximately about an hour to complete. The purpose of the interview was to collect participants' personal and background information and to determine the factors that have prevented them from learning English. The interview was conducted in Spanish and tape-recorded for further analysis. During the interview, the participants shared their experiences in attempting to acquire English and described how

they have coped in an English-speaking country in spite of the language barrier. Finally, the participants were encouraged to describe occasions when communication with English speakers has been difficult.

The interview collected the following information about the participants:

a. Personal and background information

Biographic data

The participants were asked to describe themselves and talk about their personal background: age, place of origin, ethnicity, native language(s), occupation and level of education. They also talked about the family members who lived in their households: who they were, and what their occupations were.

Reasons for immigration

Participants described their occupations before coming to the U.S. They also discussed their reasons for deciding to migrate to the U.S., and their feelings after residing in the U.S. for years.

b. Experiences trying to learn English

1. Attempts to learn English

Participants were asked to describe their L2 learning experiences.

First, they were asked if they had had English classes in their native countries. If they had, I asked them to describe the classes.

They reviewed all the steps they had taken in order to learn

English, regardless of the setting (formal -- as in classroom instruction, or informal -- as in contact with NSs). If they had taken ESL classes, they also described them and shared their experiences with the classes.

2. Factors that prevented them from learning English

Participants were encouraged to talk about all of the factors that might have kept them from learning English -- such as linguistic, psychological, and social factors that have affected their L2 acquisition process. They also explained how motivation had either helped or prevented them from learning English and how they currently feel about learning English.

c. Communication/interaction

Interaction facilitates L2 acquisition (Mackey, 1999). Therefore, it is important that participants reflect on the opportunities they have had to interact in their L2 with NSs of English. They recounted who they usually interacted with and what language they have used during the years they have resided in the U.S. They also described the extent of their L2 interactions with English NSs.

d. Current L2 situation

Participants described the problems and difficulties they currently encounter because they do not speak English. They also discussed whether they were planning to continue learning English, and what their current plans were, if this is their goal.

Free List

Each participant was asked to compile a free list of the factors that have prevented them from learning English, and what factors have facilitated in learning English. Several participants asked me to write down the lists for them, in which case they dictated the lists to me. I typed them on my computer and stored them for further analysis. The twelve individual lists were compared to see how similar or different the insights of the participants were on this issue.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Discussion

The section discusses and analyzes the data collected from the three sources: interviews, observations, and free lists.

Results from Interviews

The interview gives an overview of the participants' English language experience. It begins with the participants' experiences in Mexico where some of them had EFL classes in school. Participants also review their ESL experiences in the U.S. in formal and/or informal settings. Many participants had attended ESL classes but none of them ever finished a complete course. They explained their experiences and the reasons why they decided to drop these classes. The participants who had not attended ESL classes explained in detail the reasons why they did not take classes. In addition to formal classroom ESL instruction, participants also described how some of them have been trying to learn English on their own, and how they have also been learning from others -- both NSs and other bilingual Hispanics.

In addition, participants also provided information about the problems they face because they are not able to speak English and about their limited contact with NSs of English. They also described how they have been able to survive in Anglo communities, and their current plans (if any) to learn English.

Participants shared their experiences with EFL and ESL formal classes.

1. English as a Foreign Language Experience

During the interview, participants were asked if they had taken English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Mexico, and they were invited to describe them. Only four out of twelve participants reported having some English classes in school. They all agreed that they were taught some basic vocabulary including: colors, days of the week, spelling, and some grammar and writing. They never had conversation practice and they would pronounce the English words with a Spanish pronunciation. Some of these classes met once a month, once a week and in two cases, twice a week for 40 minutes.

2. ESL Experience

Participants were also encouraged to share their experience trying to learn English through ESL classes in the U.S. Five of them had never attended ESL classes and provided their reasons for not attending them. The rest of the participants had attended classes but none of them were able to complete the course. Two of the participants attended classes for less than one month. Three attended classes for less than six months. Lastly, two participants attended classes for two years; however, they explained that they

learned only very basic English. Finally, participants also discussed how they have tried to learn English through informal independent instruction as well.

A. No ESL Instruction

Out of the 12 participants, five of them never attended ESL classes. Among the reasons, they provided for not attend ESL classes were the following:

1. *Support of adults:* Many of the participants were teenagers when they came to the U.S. Consequently, in order to attend classes, an adult needed to sign them up and take responsibility for them. Unfortunately, none of the adults they were living with at the time were able to do that for them.
2. *Work:* Participants explained that they needed to have at least two jobs in order to be able to pay the bills, support themselves and their families, and also send money to their relatives back home.
3. *Lack of time:* Since participants spent around 60 hours a week working, they did not have enough time to attend classes. Frequently, the hours of the ESL classes, conflicted with the hours of their jobs. Some of the participants declared that they were willing to attend classes during their scant free time, however, they could not find classes available for them, since ESL schools do not have flexible schedules.
4. *Lack of motivation:* Participants mentioned that because most of the time they have been surrounded by other Hispanics, they didn't feel an urgent need to learn English. They felt their goal was to work very hard, day and night, in order to forge ahead economically.

5. *Not enough ESL classes:* Some of the participants were struggling to find time for classes, but they reported that there were not enough ESL classes for immigrants. Four of them mentioned that they have been on waiting lists for years. ESL schools are in great demand and are not able to assist every person who needs to learn English as an L2.
6. *Lack of childcare:* All the women with children pointed out that lack of childcare kept them from attending ESL classes. They cannot take their children to class and do they have anybody to take care of them. Moreover, they say they cannot afford childcare service. As a result, they cannot attend classes and must stay home taking care of their children.
7. *Lack of Transportation:* Both females and males said that they had trouble transporting themselves to ESL schools. In some cases, they did not know how to use the public transportation system. They do not know where to get off the bus, where the school is, and how to get home using public transportation. In other cases, they say that they cannot drive because the government has taken their drivers' licenses away because they are not officially permitted to drive in this country. Finally, some of them have mentioned that since public transportation does not run at night, they are not able to attend late ESL classes.

B. ESL Experience: Formal Classroom Instruction

Two of the participants only attended classes for a few days. The rest attended classes for a period of between two to five months and withdrew their classes. Only one

participant tried to restart classes again after having dropped out, but eventually withdrew from the classes. There were two participants who had managed to attend classes for two years (three hours, twice a week), but did not complete the course. Among the reasons they gave for withdrawing from the classes were the following:

1. *English is very difficult:* All of the participants mentioned that learning English was hard. They said that learning vocabulary, greetings, numbers, and phrases (especially the ones which are very similar in both languages) was not difficult. However, writing, speaking, conversation, pronunciation, and grammar were extremely hard. Many of them claimed that they were never able to understand grammar related subjects. For instance, tenses of English, subject-verb agreement, singular – plural number, and the like. They mentioned that they did not have any idea what those were, not even in Spanish. As a result, they felt that they would never be able to learn them in English either.
2. *Communication problems with U.S. instructors:* All of the participants were learning English at beginning levels. English was very unfamiliar to them and they did not understand most of what the instructors would say. In some cases, teachers would try very hard to explain things to them, but would fail most of the time. In other cases, participants mentioned that some teachers would not even try to help them understand the content of the class. They reported that if some of the students understood the topic,

the teachers would just jump to the next one, even if others did not understand it.

3. *Uncooperative Classmates:* Two of the participants (the ones who took classes for two years) mentioned that they had classmates who knew more about the language, and were willing to help them out when they struggled in class. On the other hand, other participants mentioned that regrettably, some of their classmates (also Mexicans), who knew more about the language, would not only not help them, but would ridicule them and make fun of any students who were having trouble learning English. These two participants said that this situation happened in every single class. As a result, they felt very uncomfortable in class. They also felt discouraged from asking questions or participating in class.
4. *Class did not Match Participants' Expectations:* Participants stated that they did not like the ESL classes because they felt that it was more of a game than class. Apparently, they did not understand why games are used in the ESL classroom. They said that during class, they would play games for a long time, and they felt that the time dedicated to the actual class was very short. They also said that they expected to have conversation practice in class because they wanted to be able to interact with others in the L2. Sadly for them, this did not happen. Finally, one of the participants said that he felt very uncomfortable in his classes, because the setting of the classes was a church. Although, he was not asked to join in the church

activities, he felt that he was expected to be affiliated with it. Since he did not wish to join, he decided to drop the classes.

5. *Psychological Factors*: Four participants claimed that they were shy and felt nervous and very anxious in class. These four participants also said that they felt very afraid to make mistakes, and that it was very difficult for them to participate in class. They did not feel confident, and they also felt like they were not really learning English.

C. ESL Experience: Informal Instruction

Eight of the 12 participants reported that although they were not enrolled in ESL classes, they were still trying to learn English on their own. They explained that they had bought English courses that include books, videos, CDs, and tapes to study by themselves. Others have taken advantage of public library services, where they can check out English instruction materials for free and study at home. The participants, who work with NSs, try to practice with them and ask them questions. Some of them also try to practice their English with their bilingual friends and relatives.

Interaction with NSs

When participants arrived in the U.S., they usually interacted with their Mexican relatives and some other Hispanic friends. Only one of the participants had to interact with NSs. He said that he would use gestures to try to communicate with them. At some point, all of them had to communicate with NSs in different settings, mainly at work, in service encounters, and other contexts. Currently, half of them do not often have opportunities to interact with NSs in English, since they are always surrounded by other

Hispanics. Four of the participants have interactions with NSs because they work with Anglos. Although these interactions are somewhat limited, NSs have helped them to learn in English, such as names of materials and/or procedures related to their work.

Participants said that their workmates are willing to help them out in English. When communication is hard, interactants use gestures, materials, some words in English and others in Spanish in order to understand each other. Currently, none of the participants have any close friends or relatives that only speak English. All of the participants socialize with other Hispanics in different settings, such as in the household, at work, and at church. The language they use in their daily routine is Spanish, with the exception of two participants who are obliged to speak some English at work.

Although English is not the main language participants communicate in, they still face many problems because they do not speak English.

Problems Faced due to Low Level English skills

Participants said that they often face difficulties because they do not speak English. These are:

1. *Independence*: All participants agreed that it was necessary to speak English to become independent from friends, governmental offices, and relatives who serve as interpreters. They say that since they cannot communicate with others, they need somebody else to do things for them. They need help in service encounters, filling out any kind of form, carrying out legal procedures, and so forth. They also

mentioned that they needed to speak English not only to communicate with NSs of English, but also to communicate with other NNSs who do not speak Spanish.

2. *Job issues:* Seven of the participants mentioned that they have fewer opportunities to get a better job because they cannot speak English. They also mentioned that they have had misunderstandings at their jobs because of poor English skills. In some cases, they said that they have been told that if they spoke English, they could get a better position with more benefits at their place of work. As a result, they miss out on those opportunities.
3. *Health Issues:* Eight of the participants revealed that health service is a primary concern for them. They said that they were able to make an appointment to go to the doctor in English. However, once in the doctor's office, they had trouble explaining how they felt, what hurt, and understanding what the doctor was saying or asking of them. Five of the participants declared that there had been occasions when the hospital had cancelled their appointments because it did not have interpreters and they were not able to speak English. The participants explained that this was a big problem for them because sometimes it was not easy to find interpreters, especially in the middle of the night, when they have had to rush to the emergency room with a sick relative.
4. *School issues:* Finally, three of the participants (all mothers) mentioned that they felt badly because they were not able to speak to their children's teachers. They were concerned about their children's education and could not really be part of it because they could not communicate with the school staff, especially with teachers. They would like to monitor their children's learning and development

and help them with their homework and projects. Unfortunately, what they can do is very limited.

Survival in Anglo Communities

One important issue that the interview revealed was an explanation of how monolingual Hispanics survive in an English speaking environment, especially living in Anglo neighborhoods. Nine of the participants have relatives, friends, and workmates who are bilinguals (English and Spanish). These are their interpreters and translators. When they do not have interpreters and need to communicate with NSs, participants reported that they had found a few Americans who knew some Spanish and because they themselves knew some English, they would try to communicate using both languages. In other cases, when they are speaking with people who do not know any Spanish, they use all the words they know in English, they point at things, and they use numerous gestures. They also added that in some places (like stores, supermarkets, and auto shops) they try to look for Hispanics who work at those places, or Hispanic owned places (like Mexican supermarkets or Mexican restaurants) so they can be assisted in Spanish.

Current Plans to Learn English

Although participants mentioned that they would love to learn English and improve their situation in the U.S., surprisingly none of them have current concrete plans to continue learning English, and in some cases, they mentioned that they will not try to continue learning English. They described four reasons for this:

1. *Lack of time:* Four participants reported that the hours of the classes conflicted with their work hours. They do not have time to attend classes because they have to work many hours each day and night.
2. *Going back to Mexico:* Three participants are currently planning to go back to Mexico because of the current economic crisis and the resulting lack of opportunities to progress economically in the U.S. As a consequence, they feel that they no longer need to learn English.
3. *Lack of ESL schools:* Six of the participants are either on a waiting list or are still looking for a place to attend ESL classes.
4. *Lack of childcare:* Two female participants said that they could not afford childcare services; consequently they have had to put a hold on attending classes until their toddlers grow old enough to attend school. At that time, they intend to attend ESL classes.
5. *Transportation:* Three participants say that they need help with transportation. If they do not have transportation, it is impossible for them to attend ESL classes.

Results from Participants' Observations

Participants were observed twice (once on a weekday and once on a weekend). All of the participants interacted primarily in Spanish with other fellow Hispanics. They interacted in Spanish with their family members, other relatives, friends, and people at work. The settings where they were observed were: participants' home, friends' homes, relatives' homes, parks, restaurants, churches, stores, supermarkets, and three at work. I

was not able to observe all of the participants at work, because their workplaces access was restricted to employees only. However, they were able to use their cellular phones during breaks and lunch times during work hours. I was able to call them and ask them about the interactions they were having throughout the day. As a result, some of the observation information was collected via telephone.

Most of the participants' interactions (approximately 80%) were in Spanish, and as expected, they were successful. Whenever possible, participants would try to go to places they knew, where there were other Hispanics (for instance restaurants, supermarkets, stores, etc.). This also applied when they needed to use the phone. They tried to look for Spanish operators as well.

However, English interactions had different results. First of all, all of the participants had at least two interactions in English, either with Americans or with people whose L1 was a language other than Spanish or English (especially people from Asian countries). 67% of the English interactions were not successful, in that there were unresolved misunderstandings. Participants needed either friends or family members (especially children at school who are bilingual) to translate and be their interpreters. Some of these interactions took place at service encounter situations. For instance, two participants (on different occasions) tried to return something at a store, and could not do so successfully in English. In those cases, they either had to use their friends who were accompanying them as interpreters, and in a couple of cases I had to intervene because communication was not successful at all. For example, in one case, the cashier at a supermarket had to use some of her Spanish to try to communicate with the participant.

Nevertheless, the participant's friend, who is a Hispanic bilingual, had to step in and translate for them. In another example, the cashier was getting upset and impatient because the participant could not explain to her what she wanted in English. In this case, I had to intervene as an interpreter and help them both out. Another participant who works in a restaurant said that he had had a meeting at work in English, and that he was able to understand some of the things that were mentioned. Then, right after the meeting, he and all of the other Hispanics that work there got together and tried to put together the information they had gleaned from the meeting. They all shared what they understood, and discussed the things they did not understand. He added that as a group, they helped each other to understand the important issues discussed at the meeting.

Some of the interactions I observed required the participants to use their very basic knowledge of English. For example, some of them greeted their Anglo neighbors in English. One of the participants had to call in sick to her job, and she did it in English without any trouble. Another participant, who works in cleaning, asked the receptionist if she could vacuum her office. She said, "Vacuum now?" and the receptionist said "Yes".

Other participants reported that at work, they had to speak in English about work-related tasks and were successful in their interactions. However, some participants and their interactants had to turn to different kinds of strategies to communicate with each other. For instance, some of the Anglo speakers would use some words in Spanish. Others (including the participants) would use gestures, sounds, and point at things. Incidentally, I think it was interesting that one of the participants, who works in a

supermarket, would use not only some English words (like numbers and greetings), but also in Chinese, Hmong, and Lao with his Asian customers.

Results from Free Lists

Each participant was asked to write down a list of both the factors that they thought had prevented them from learning English well, and the factors that they thought would help them to learn English better. Then, the twelve lists were compared to illustrate the insights of the participants on this issue. The lists showed the following results:

Factors that have prevented participants from learning English:

1. *Time Issues: 100%*

All of the participants mentioned having problems with time. They addressed two problems related to time. One was the lack of time for attending classes, and the other, the fact that the time of the classes conflicted with their work schedule. The participants said that during certain periods of time, they had worked around 60 hours a week. In spite of their work hours, they were willing to learn English, but they could not find classes that met when during their free time.

2. *Problems with teachers and classmates 67%*

67% of the participants mentioned that they had problems communicating with their teachers because they had from low to nonexistent communication skills in English, and their teachers could not communicate with them in Spanish.

Moreover, all of the participants mentioned that their instructors were not patient

with them. They even stated that their teachers would get angry when they did not understand something or could not pronounce words correctly or fluently. In addition, participants mentioned the fact that they had classmates, some of them even from the same home town in Mexico, who ridiculed them when they made mistakes. They felt they were in a hostile environment at school and that is why they dropped their ESL classes.

3. *Lack of Transportation: 67%*

67% of the participants said that it is impossible for them to attend ESL school at night for two reasons. One, the public transportation system does not run late at night, and the other, that they could not drive themselves because the government had taken away their drivers' licenses. Moreover, four participants reported that they are unfamiliar with the public transportation system and did not know how to use it.

4. *Lack of Motivation: 42%*

42% of the participants said they lost motivation. They got frustrated not only because they were not learning English, but also because they had personal problems that made them feel depressed. They also brought up that they are currently planning to go back to Mexico. Therefore, they do not feel motivated to learn English.

5. *Linguistic Difficulties: 33%*

33% of the participants mentioned that learning English had been very difficult. They specifically mentioned pronunciation and grammar as being particularly difficult to master.

6. *No Access to ESL classes 33%*

Four of the participants mentioned that they had not had access to ESL classes.

They had been on waiting lists for years. Apparently, there is not enough room for all immigrants who need ESL in the available classes.

7. *Lack of childcare: 25%*

Three female participants said that they had not been able to attend classes because they did not have access to childcare services.

8. *Support of others: 17%*

Two participants mentioned that when they arrived to the U.S. they were underage. In order to attend any kind of school (K-12 or ESL classes) in the U.S., they needed an adult to register them. However, they said that they could not find anyone willing to do that for them. As a result, they could not attend classes at that time.

Factors that would Help Participants to Learn English:

1. *Flexible Schedules and More Access to ESL classes: 100%*

All participants stated that for years they have been looking a suitable schedule that would not interfere with their work. At the same time, they also stated that they had been told at ESL schools that there was not enough room for the large number of immigrants who needed ESL classes.

2. *Patient teachers and Extra Help:67%*

67% of the participants said that they had dropped their English classes because they had had impatient teachers. They said that they needed teachers (if possible

bilinguals) who are willing not only to teach but also to help them. Three participants stated specifically that they needed extra help with grammar. They believe they are not able to grasp this subject due to their minimal educational background.

3. *Means of Transportation: 50%*

50% of the participants lacked driver' licenses and were not able to obtain one. As a result, they were not able to drive to classes. They would have liked the government to issue them driver's licenses, or for public transportation to be available to get them to night classes.

4. *Interaction with NSs: 50%*

50% of the participants noted that in order to learn English, they needed to practice with others. They said they would like to have more opportunities to socialize and have more contact with NSs to practice their English.

5. *Obtain affordable childcare services:33%*

33% of the female participants declared that if they had access to childcare services, they would be able to attend ESL classes.

6. *To study at home:17%*

17% of the participants said that it is necessary to put effort into learning English. They believe that it is important that they review and practice what they learn at home.

7. *More useful classroom activities: 17%*

17% of the participants stated that they needed more traditional structured classes.

They would also like to have more practical activities like conversations/interactions in English.

8. *Nobody should feel marginalized: 17%*

17% of the participants noted that having classmates who ridiculed them made them feel marginalized. They added that for the sake of learning, it is important to have a comfortable environment where everybody can learn at their own pace.

Thus, individuals who ridicule their classmates should not be allowed in the ESL classes.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Monolingual Hispanic immigrants realize how important it is to know English. They know that in many cases, “competence in English as a key to better employment” (Callahan, 2001, p. 421). However, there are still a good number of them who have resided in the U.S. for more than five years, like the participants of this research, who have not been able to learn English. The results gathered from the three instruments (interviews, participants’ observations, and free lists) contribute to confirm all the hypotheses. I had hypothesized that the reasons restraining Hispanics to learn English are related to socio-economic, educational and cultural reasons such as: limited time, limited money, low level of education, difficult access to adequate ESL programs, and low level of contact with NSs.

Socio-economic Situation: Limited Time, Limited Money

“Low socioeconomic status is correlated with low English proficiency.” (Sole, 1990, p. 35). The fact that Hispanics in the U.S. (especially monolinguals) lack equality in economic and educational fields is well supported by research (Lucas, 1981; Wang, 2006; Hayes, 1989; Tse, 2001, McManus, Gould, & Welch, 1983; Rodriguez, 1997). The participants of this research also supported this fact. Across the three instruments, they constantly mentioned that due to their low-economic situation, they must work very hard. They mentioned that they not only have to take care of themselves and their families in the U.S., but they also provide for their relatives in Mexico. Some of the participants work around 60 hours a week. As a result, they have limited time to attend ESL classes. In addition, the hours of the ESL classes often conflict with the hours of their jobs.

Low Level of Education

Educational background influences an L2 learner's learning potential and opportunity (Hakuta, Bialystok & Wiley, 2003; McManus, Gould, & Welch, 1983). SLA studies have shown that when L2 learning adults have a low level of formal education, they are less likely to master L2 skills in formal classroom instruction (Greenberg et al, 1992, Bonch-Bruevich, 2001; Mills, 2005; Garcia 2003). ESL classes teach English formally and focus on developing students' grammatical competence (Tomlinson, 2003). As a result L2 students with low educational background, just like that of the participants, struggle trying to grasp English's grammatical system and other language skills. L2 students who do not have knowledge of their L1's linguistic concepts and/or metalanguage cannot transfer that knowledge to their L2 system. As one of the participants said, "I do not even

know what a verb is in Spanish". This situation makes it even harder for them to grasp the more complex aspects of English. On several occasions, participants mentioned that despite the fact that they were attending ESL classes, they did not feel as they were learning to speak English.

Difficult Access to Adequate ESL Programs

Researchers have also concluded that many immigrants, specifically Hispanics, struggle first with finding available ESL classes, then, if they do find them, remaining in them (Wheling, 1999; Lee, 2007; Perez Canado, 2007). The participants pointed out three important things they expect from their ESL classes: patient teachers, collaborative classmates, and useful classroom activities. Participants also added that there are two other important factors that make ESL classes access more complicated: lack of childcare and transportation. Lack of childcare particularly affects the Hispanic women. Participants said that if they did not have this problem, they would be attending ESL classes. Moreover, adequate transportation is impeding 50% of the participants from attending ESL classes.

Little Contact with NSs

Social interactions are important to L2's development (Lee, 2007). Although all of the participants live in Anglo communities, most of them do not really have access to interactions with NSs. Hispanics and Anglos are not really communicating with each others. During the observations, the only interactions that the participants had with their Anglo neighbors were basically polite greetings (Block, 2007; Callahan, 2001; Schecter

& Bayley, 1997; Cooke, Brown, & Zhu, 2007; Firth & Wagner, 1997). Participants believe that their interactions with NSs are sporadic for three reasons. First, they think their English skills are not really good enough to be able to interact successfully with NSs. Second, they are constantly surrounded by other Hispanics who use Spanish as well. Third, a couple of them mentioned that some NSs are not really interested in conversing with them. They assume that the reason for this is related to racism (Tum, 2003).

On the other hand, several participants said they have had contact with NSs at their workplace. They also affirmed that their workmates are very cooperative, and have helped them with their English skills. Unfortunately, workplace interactions are rather restricted, and thus do not always provide the best context for natural input and interaction. Research on interaction in the workplace has demonstrated that when there are other immigrants with the same linguistic background, they are most likely to interact with them and not with NSs (Maheaux-Pelletier, 2006; Cooke, Brown, & Zhu, 2007). In addition, work is often not the best place to have involved interactions, since many workers cannot engage in lengthy conversations between themselves and/or customers during work hours (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Finally, some of the participants said that their work tasks require little or no interaction with others at all (for example, cleaning jobs). Undoubtedly, for L2 learners to become successful learners, they need to use the L2 for communication and interaction on a regular basis (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

Other Issues

The literature reviewed for this project also brought up other issues related to adults L2 acquisition. These range from linguistic to psychological factors. Participants, talked about how the differences between English and Spanish make English acquisition difficult. They also talked about how motivation and self-esteem have influenced in their L2 acquisition process. Age is a critical variable for L2 acquisition (Ramsey & Wright, 1974). The Critical Age Hypothesis argues that L2 acquisition after puberty is increasingly difficult (Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley, 2003). All of the participants have been struggling with English for years. They all became exposed to English after the onset of puberty. Results also show that personality factors such as lack of self-esteem, anxiety, and inhibition (Brown, 2007a), along with motivation (at different points in time) have also deterred participants' English acquisition.

This paper is intended to encourage educators and policy-makers in the field of adult education to reconsider ESL programs. It is not easy for host societies to provide immigrants with adequate access L2 training (Maheaux-Pelletier, 2006). More efforts are needed in order to reach all immigrants successfully, especially the ones who are still young and have many years to work and reside in the U.S. Finally, I also believe it is important for these educators to address some of the anomalies that have taken place in the ESL classrooms, as the participants reported (lack of cooperative instructors, and the presence of harassing classmates), because successful L2 acquisition requires a safe learning environment (Lee, 2007).

Further Research

The literature reviewed for this research discusses the process of acculturation that immigrants undergo when adapting themselves to a new culture. It would be interesting to see how identity may have played a role in the English acquisition of the same or a similar population. Immigrants are forced to reconstruct and redefine themselves for their own sense of security. Factors like race, ethnicity, nationality, migration, gender, social class, and language should be considered, since they are closely related in the construction of identity. In view of the fact that language, identity and culture are interconnected, patterns of language socialization in L2 learning contexts should be examined (Block, 2007; Nunez-Janes, 2004).

A good L2 learning context example to consider should be the ESL classroom. There have been accounts of incidents which have occurred in ESL classrooms that have impacted negatively on the learners' identities (Block, 2007). It would be significant to see if these incidents have impacted adults' L2 acquisition as well. If they have, L2 teachers should be made aware of them. They need to understand the different dimensions involved in acquiring not only an L2 but also the possibility of acquiring a second identity; in doing so, they will be able to incorporate productive strategies for successful language learning and teaching (Norton, 1997).

Chapter VI

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. Can you describe me your ethnicity?
4. Which members of the family live in your household? What is their occupation?
5. What is/are your native language(s)?
6. What is your current occupation?
7. What was the last grade you attended in your native country?
8. Did you have English classes back home? How would you describe them?
9. What was your occupation before coming to the U.S.?
10. How old were you when you arrived to the U.S.? When was that?
11. Why did you decide to come to the U.S.?
12. How would you describe your current economic situation?
13. When you first arrived in the U.S., who did you usually interact with? What language did you use?

14. Today, if you need to speak with English speakers, how do you communicate with them?
15. Describe your English knowledge and proficiency.
16. Did you have an opportunity to learn English when you first got into the U.S.? Have you attended ESL classes? How was your experience?
17. If you attended ESL classes, were you able to finish your English classes?
18. Have you had chance to practice your English with native speakers? When? With who? How often?
19. How do you feel about learning English? What aspects you believe are easy and which ones are difficult?
20. Do you have friends or close relatives who speak only English?
21. Do you socialize with any group or community in particular? What language do you use with them?
22. What problems or difficulties you encounter because you do not speak English?
23. Are you currently planning to learn English?
24. In your daily routine, which language do you speak? Who do you usually speak with?